

THE EUGENICS REVIEW

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"Eugenics is the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally."

NOTES OF THE QUARTER

THE *Eugenics Society* has suffered a grievous loss in the death of Dr. Austin Freeman. Most gentle and lovable as a man, wise and tolerant in council, and always scholarly, stimulating and dependable as a writer, he exerted himself in the cause of eugenics until his last illness made it impossible for him to do so any longer. How completely he triumphed over pain and infirmity is exemplified in the philosophic temper of his last contributions to the REVIEW, in the issues of April and October 1942.

His writing, as could be expected from a professional author with an immense following, was always lucid and interesting, his judgment always erudite and balanced. He never fumbled, never wasted or misused a word, never failed to produce, within the exact limits prescribed, a complete, neatly-rounded off and satisfying piece of work. His reviews, models of their kind, were invariably informative, critical and fair. They never left the reader in any doubt about the subject matter of the book or whether it had been worthily dealt with; and they could always be trusted to do justice to the author's

opinions—and even more than justice if they were opinions which to Austin Freeman were antipathetic. These qualities, and that nice softly-spoken irony which he seemed to reserve for the private ears of his more perceptive readers, were nowhere better displayed than in his contributions to the EUGENICS REVIEW.

Richard Austin Freeman, as befitted a man of magnificent physique and versatile talents, lived a varied and for many years an adventurous life. Qualifying from the Middlesex Hospital in 1886, he joined the Gold Coast Medical Service, accompanying expeditions to Ashanti and Bontuku as Medical Officer, naturalist and surveyor, and later serving as a member of the Anglo-German Boundary Commission for Togoland. To this period belongs his first published work, *Travels and Life in Ashanti and Saman*, which has been well described as "worthy to take its place among the classics of travel literature." As a writer in *The Times* put it: "His observations on the history of British relations with Ashanti in the nineteenth century, though hardly flattering to ourselves, are both wise and penetrating, as are many of his remarks on native life and mentality. . . . It is perhaps worth mentioning that, writing as he did before the full facts about the method of malarial infection were known, he seems to have anticipated the discovery that the plasmodium is introduced by the bite of the mosquito, and not by being swallowed in water or inhaled in dust, as Manson believed at that time."

About 1892, having the previous year been invalided home with blackwater fever, Freeman entered upon medical practice in this country, at first privately, then in the Prison Medical Service and as Medical Officer to the Port of London Authority; but in 1901, for health reasons, he turned to full-time

authorship, producing the long series of Thorndyke novels on which his fame with the general public so securely rests.

During the War of 1914-18 he commanded a Home Counties Field Ambulance Unit of the R.A.M.C. One who served under him in this period recalls his quiet dignity and that constant consideration for the men's welfare which inspired in them feelings of genuine devotion. "His lectures on human anatomy, delivered without any notes, were a never-failing delight; they were graphically illustrated on the blackboard and punctuated with a dry whimsical humour. On route marches he always walked with us, leading us along the more interesting by-paths; occasionally he would play the organ in a village church during the fall-out. For he was musician as well as artist, author, and naturalist. I never heard him raise his voice in anger; yet no one commanded greater authority." We need not look far for the original of those qualities, above all the learning, scientific integrity and urbanity, which, for many of us, make Thorndyke the most appealing of all the successors of Dupin and Sherlock Holmes.

Dr. Austin Freeman remained on the active list until 1922, by which time he had begun his long and fruitful association with the *Eugenics Society* and made his earliest contributions to eugenic thought, notably in his *Social Decay and Regeneration*, published in 1921. At the outbreak of the present war he was among the members of Council who were elected to serve on the Emergency Committee; and this he did, placing his wisdom and experience at the service of the *Society* and this REVIEW even when, through disability, he could no longer appear in person. His last communication to the Editor was an apology for not acceding to a request for an article. This was his only refusal in ten years and it was evident that the end could not be far off. He died in his eighty-second year.

All Fellows and Members of the *Eugenics Society* will wish to join in our expression of deep sympathy with Mrs. Austin Freeman in her sad bereavement.

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Dr. C. P. Blacker writes: "Austin Free-

man was a regular and conscientious attendant at Council meetings and at meetings of sub-committees on which he served by reason of his literary experience. He was often silent at these meetings but when he spoke everyone listened. I recall an occasion when another member of the Council took exception to the praise which Freeman had accorded in a review to a certain book. The controversy was unduly prolonged and became heated. Freeman, though the leading actor, sat silent and was the most unperturbed person sitting round the table. When the matter was settled in his favour, he thanked the meeting for showing an understanding of why he had written as he had, and then he apologized to his critic for having given him offence. He showed a rare detachment and magnanimity. He bore a long, painful and crippling illness with perfect resignation. He was a wise, gentle and brave man."

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It was announced on December 1st, in both Houses of Parliament, that the Government had decided to set up a Royal Commission to inquire into the birth rate and the trends of population in Great Britain. At the time of going to press the constitution of the Commission has not been made public, but the fact that the Lord Chancellor will be its chairman has been generally taken to indicate the Government's deep concern with the demographic elements in our post-war problems. It may be hoped that the Commission, in further token of this concern, will move faster than has been customary with Royal Commissions in the past; and that its findings and recommendations will form a basis for prompt action by Parliament. We have been told by the Prime Minister that measures for ensuring food, work and homes are in active preparation; but any long-term plans for the provision of these necessities must take account of the numbers and distribution of our population, by families, localities and age groups; and they must be integrated with such policies as may be pursued to influence these demographic factors in directions most favourable to our future.

This information on our human resources it will be the task of the Royal Commission to

supply. Its terms of reference are, first, to examine the facts relating to the present population trends in Great Britain; secondly, to investigate the causes of these trends and to consider their probable consequences; and thirdly, to consider what measures, if any, should be taken in the national interest to influence the future trend of population. In all its inquiries the Commission will have the help of at least three technical committees, dealing respectively with statistical, medical and biological, and economic problems. Apparently it is intended that these committees should start at once, pursuing their specialized inquiries while the Commission explores and takes evidence on the more general issues connected with the subject; but their findings, which in the first place will be reported direct to the Government, will be made available to the Commission as soon as possible. Other technical committees have been proposed and may be appointed, but this, and the scope and character of the matters for investigation, will be decided in consultation with the chairman of the Commission.

The Archbishop of York's appeal for special consideration to the moral factors in our population problems could perhaps be met by the appointment of a committee concerned with these exclusively; or, better still, there might be a committee with wider terms of reference, to advise on all the psychological factors that may influence the decision to or away from parenthood.

Obviously such factors cannot be treated in isolation. They have different weight in different social groups, and are themselves to some degree determined by events in the economic sphere. The passion for "keeping up with the Jones's," for example—that pervasive influence upon the pattern of social behaviour which was stressed by R. and K. Titmuss in their *Parents Revolt*—has its roots in economics as well as morals. So have such influences on the birth rate as the high cost of education, for ultimately it is not the family income alone but the parents' view of how it should be spent that decides whether they (like the Jones's) will produce only one or two expensively educated children or several educated at smaller cost and

possibly no worse. Although, then, the removal of economic deterrents to parenthood, and the provision of economic incentives, could hardly fail to have some influence on the birth rate, the decisive influence is the place of parenthood, of the duties, responsibilities and pleasures of bringing up a healthy well-cared-for family, in our scale of values.

This, of course, does not mean that values favourable to parenthood can flourish just as well in any sort of economic climate; or that it is anything but an impertinence to persuade couples, however well endowed biologically, however responsive morally, that it is their duty to provide more children than they can afford to bring up in health and decency. On the other hand, we have the trend in the birth rate among the comparatively well-to-do to warn us against expecting too much from economic incentives alone.

A committee concerned with moral and other psychological factors in fertility could also safeguard the Commission against some of the errors in the German and Italian policies for raising the birth rate. The meagre success of these policies is often adduced as proof of the contention that "people cannot be bribed into parenthood"; but we need accept neither the premise—which implies that these policies were purely economic—nor the conclusions derived from it. Quite apart from the fact that the relief offered to parents in Germany or Italy could not possibly tempt any couple capable of working out a sum in simple arithmetic, the argument overlooks the psychological stresses under which the people in these countries lived and the ineptitude of much of the propaganda to which they were subjected.

We have not escaped similar errors here, but at least they have been made by individuals speaking in their private capacity, not by the Government speaking for the nation. No one pays much attention when (as in a recent parliamentary debate) people with small families are described as "despicable, unnatural and unpatriotic"; the fact that many couples stop at one or two children from worthy motives and that large families

are not always an expression of patriotic zeal has not escaped general notice. Nevertheless, such psychological obtuseness should not be dismissed as unimportant. It is not enough merely to recognize misconceptions about the deterrents, conscious and unconscious, to parenthood: on this subject, as well as on the psychological elements in a well-directed campaign for larger families, we need positive information such as only experts can supply and evaluate. In these matters the help of a special advisory committee would be invaluable.

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Nothing was said in the original announcement about the quality of our population, but it may be hoped that this aspect of the problem will receive full weight in the Commission's deliberations and in the proposals it makes to Parliament. A wise population policy, one concerned not merely with numbers and age distribution but also with biological endowment, will aim frankly at a eugenic differential fertility—that is to say, at producing the largest families in the best-endowed sections of society. Such a policy would cut right across economic and social class differences, which as such have no eugenic significance whatever. It would be concerned solely with differences in inborn qualities—of health, physique, mind and character; and would be designed to raise the general level of endowment, both by encouraging fertility in gifted stocks, in every class, and by discouraging and in extreme cases preventing it in those with the poorest hereditary equipment.

It has been argued that questions of numbers and age-distribution are outside the province of eugenics. Nevertheless, eugenics cannot altogether ignore them. For one thing, it may seem a little fanciful to be concerned about the attributes of a posterity which, according to some estimates of our demographic future, we shall never have; and even if events belie these gloomy forebodings, we may still have to reckon with policies designed to maintain the level of our population at the expense of its biological endowment. In short, though quality is our main concern, and though we may, and

do, hold divergent views as to the numbers at which our population could most desirably be stabilized, we nevertheless must face the fact that our present birth rate, relatively high though it is, cannot afford stability at any level; and we must accept our special responsibility for ensuring that any measures designed for arresting a progressive decline in our numbers shall be eugenic both in intention and in practice.

To take a simple instance. Any population policy must include among its components the provision of family allowances. Such allowances may be so small as to be without democratic significance: a means for redistributing wealth and offering a little more sustenance to existing families rather than for stimulating the production of more and larger ones. Or the allowances may be large enough to stimulate the birth rate in the poorer economic groups but not in those with higher standards of expenditure. Even on such a scale the allowances would have some eugenic value; for, within the groups affected, their influence would be mainly on couples gifted with enough foresight to measure the allowances against the cost of maintaining the children on whose behalf they are paid. Or, a third possibility, the allowances may be adapted, by such devices as intra-professional pools, to the varying standards of living within the nation. In this event, they would serve, with the other components of a broadly-conceived population policy, both to raise the general birth rate and, on the whole, to ensure the greatest increase of population from the most responsible couples in all groups and classes.

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Mr. Titmuss's *Birth, Poverty and Wealth*, which is the subject of a review and correspondence in this issue, has had a cordial reception in the press. Of the many articles devoted to it—which included a leader in *The Times* and equally prominent notices in other periodicals—not the least laudatory was one by Professor Lancelot Hogben in *Nature*. Professor Hogben described the book as "temperate and stimulating, lucid and well documented," adding that "it lifts a class of problems calling for immediate

legislative action above the fog of political indignation to the level of a factual analysis of human needs and human knowledge available for implementing their satisfaction." All this praise was well merited and we were glad to see it quoted in advertisements of the book. It was the sort of thing publishers wish they could say themselves, and sometimes do in their less restrained moments.

But Professor Hogben was not content to applaud Mr. Titmuss; he also improved the occasion with his familiar attack on Galton and eugenics. We dealt with it all in the issue of January 1940 (p. 203) and have nothing to add to or take from what we said there. In fact the episode might have been ignored but for a curious sequel. Following Professor Hogben's review, Lord Horder as President of the *Society* and Dr. C. P. Blacker as its Honorary Secretary sent the following letter to the Editor of *Nature*:

In a review of Mr. R. M. Titmuss's *Birth, Poverty and Wealth*, which appeared in your issue of October 23rd, Professor Hogben develops an attack upon Galton and eugenics. Back numbers of the EUGENICS REVIEW, he writes, provide a record of human superstitions which Mr. Titmuss's book now helps to explode.

In his preoccupation with what eugenists were saying over thirty years ago, Professor Hogben does less than justice to what they are thinking to-day. The reader of his article would hardly suppose that Mr. Titmuss has for some years been a member of the Council of the *Eugenics Society*; that for over a year he was Editor of the EUGENICS REVIEW and that the publication of his book was made possible by a grant from the *Eugenics Society*—a fact clearly acknowledged by the author in his preface.

The letter could hardly have been shorter; it was to the point; it dealt with matters of fact, not of opinion; it confined itself to a false impression which *Nature* had given and for the refutation of which it therefore had some responsibility. Nevertheless, the letter was not published and Dr. Blacker received this explanation:

The Editors of *Nature* present their compliments to Dr. C. P. Blacker, and beg to say they have decided, after consideration and inquiry, not to publish the comments on

Professor Hogben's review of Mr. R. M. Titmuss's publication *Birth, Poverty and Wealth*, which have been submitted jointly by Dr. Blacker and Lord Horder. The Editors do not think any useful purpose will be served by the publication of these comments.

This correspondence may be allowed to speak for itself. The publication of misleading comments is nothing unusual, nor is editorial disinclination to publish a correction. These are the commonplaces of certain types of journalism. But it is odd, and a little disturbing, to come across them in our leading scientific weekly. We only mention the subject because the debasement of journalistic standards seems to us a matter of public concern—an opinion in which we feel sure the Editors of *Nature* will concur.

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In his stimulating paper on family size Dr. Norman Paterson draws attention to dysgenic possibilities in the practice of contraception:

"Probably the most commonly accepted view among eugenists in the past regarding contraception has been that married people should be entirely free to choose whether they will have children or not, and therefore contraception should be available to everyone. It is said that where these articles are prohibited the unfit outbreed the fit and that such evils as venereal disease and artificial abortion increase. In democratic countries, it is held, people must be free to decide these matters for themselves."

This is a fair statement of the case, but we may perhaps amplify it at one or two points. If contraception were practised equally throughout the whole community, by the well- and ill-endowed alike, in every class, the effect would be neither eugenic nor dysgenic. The total birth rate would fall or rise as the practice of contraception became more or less general, but the differential birth rate would be constant and the relative numbers of the diverse stocks in our population would remain unaltered, from generation to generation.*

In practice such biological neutrality has never been attained; not at least in this

* This argument neglects the inference of variations in mortality.

country. Birth control has always been more widely and effectively used in the higher than in the lower social groups; and, far more significant from the eugenic point of view, its influence has always been greatest in the most intelligent stocks within each group. The differences between classes, and probably between the stocks within the classes, are not now as great as they were; nevertheless they still exist and their tendency, with few exceptions, is on the whole dysgenic. What eugenic advantages we now enjoy are mainly the result of more generally practised contraception, not of less. This does not mean that the narrowing of the differential cannot be attributed, in some small measure, to a relative rise of the birth rate in the more highly endowed groups; but in the main it has resulted from a fall in the birth rate of those less gifted, as the knowledge of birth control has seeped gradually downward through the intellectual levels of the community.

If this very sketchy analysis is correct, it follows that the results of contraception have become less dysgenic as its practice has become more widespread. This, as far as it goes, is to the good, but we must not make the mistake of regarding the mere mitigation of an evil as a positive good. Staving off defeat is not—as we have all too often had to learn—quite the same as victory. Unless the differential fertility of our country follows an entirely new pattern—such as that of pre-war Stockholm where, according to Edin and Hutchison, family size was on the whole proportional to educational status (a rough though admittedly uncertain measure of biological endowment)—there can be, to say the least, no solid improvement in the quality of our inheritance.

Dr. Paterson's proposal for the control of "family planning as at present conceived" raises many questions, some of which strike at the very roots of democratic theory and practice. But for the present we shall touch on one only—namely, the eugenic results of restrictions on the dissemination of birth control knowledge and facilities for its practice. Can it be imagined that legislation to this end would not be circumvented by the

people of this country? Some, indeed, would give up the struggle and revert to uncontrolled fertility; but these would be the irresponsible and mentally subnormal persons who could be deterred by obstacles that their better endowed fellow citizens would always overcome. No laws or regulations could effectively prevent the practice of contraception by those whose qualities specially fit them to be the parents of the coming generation. Rather than permit the intrusion of authority into their personal lives, such couples would devise makeshift contraceptives or use methods that are potentially harmful. They would continue, as at present, to make their voluntary contributions to posterity, but coming generations would be recruited in increasing proportions from those least fitted to bear the responsibilities of parenthood.

Professor Carr-Saunders summed up the whole matter thus:*

If anything is certain it is that people will resist being driven back under the tyranny of the unlimited family; therefore all measures are suspect which are associated with an anti-birth-control movement. But it is much more than bad tactics. It implies a complete misunderstanding of the only possible solution of the small family problem. The solution must begin by welcoming the voluntary small family system, and that means welcoming birth control. For birth control is not merely a practice which must be tolerated; it has positive functions of great importance to perform, such as, for example, making possible the proper spacing of the family. Let it be said clearly that the escape from the unlimited family makes a very great step forward in human history. The problem is to adjust outlook to the responsibility involved by the transition to the voluntary family system.

We agree with Dr. Paterson's diagnosis, that contraception is often misused and that many couples restrict their fertility to the public danger. But we suggest that the remedy lies not in trying to put the clock back but in the creation of a eugenic conscience throughout the community, and of conditions in which this conscience can find its freest expression.

* *World Population*, 1936, p. 258.